

EXHIBIT H

THE ROAD TO 9/11: THE SEPTEMBER 11 TERRORIST ATTACK ON THE WORLD TRADE CENTER

Brian Michael Jenkins

Introduction

I have been asked by Plaintiffs to provide expert testimony concerning the origin, planning, and development of the 9/11 plot (including discussion of various precursors and testing of previous plots); the roles of relevant actors in originating, planning, and developing the plot; the training and selection of operatives; operational aspects of the plot and attack; and the events of the day of the 9/11 attack. Attached as Exhibit A is my CV. Attached as Exhibit B is a list of materials on which I relied in forming my opinions stated in this report, in addition to relying on my own personal recollections, involvement, and experience.

Approach of This Analysis

The video of the collapsing World Trade Center Towers on the morning of September 11, 2001, remains the iconic image of the 21st century terrorist menace. The horrific images have been seen again and again by hundreds of millions of people. The familiarity of the images creates an imagined knowledge and the illusion of memory. We are now talking about an event that occurred more than 18 years ago and for many people, the image etched in our collective memory is all that remains. For younger people, it is all there ever was. Yet many do not understand how such an attack came about: What were its precedents? Who was responsible for its planning? How were the attackers assembled and recruited? And what does this tell us about the organization behind the attack?¹

¹ The 9/11 Commission, *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, Washington DC: U.S. Government, 2004, and its accompanying staff reports remain the most authoritative account of the planning and preparations for the 9/11 attack. Subsequent publications have added a great deal of material about U.S. perceptions and actions (including failures) prior to 9/11, but have relied on the 9/11 Commission for the account of the adversaries. One notable exception is Terry McDermott's *Perfect Soldiers: Who They Were and Why They Did It*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005, which provided new information about the Hamburg cell. See also: Terry McDermott and Josh Meyer, *The Hunt for KSM: Inside the Pursuit and Takedown of the Real 9/11 Mastermind, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed* New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2012. For an account of the frustrations of the 9/11 Commission in getting all of the information it wanted, see: John Farmer [Senior Counsel to the 9/11

This review looks at the operation from al Qaeda's point of view. How did its leaders view the world? What were they trying to do? What obstacles did they face in seeking to attack the most powerful nation in the world on its homeland, and how did they manage to overcome them? Adopting this perspective implies no sympathy with the perpetrators of this terrible crime. The approach is merely a way of better understanding the enemy we confronted then and still do now.

How Did This Happen?

Just days after the event, I was asked by James Hoge and Gideon Rose, the editor and managing editor of *Foreign Affairs* magazine to join a group of analysts to address the question, How did this happen? Specifically, I was asked to examine the 9/11 operation itself. The operation told us a great deal about the organization that carried it out. To me, "*organization*" was the operative word.

I described my observations at the time in an essay titled "The Organization Men: Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack," which became the first chapter in *How Did This Happen? Terrorism and the New War*.² The book came out in November 2001, just two months after the attacks. To my knowledge, it was the first volume to examine the background of the 9/11 attacks and their consequences. Its authors wrote under intense time pressure. It was still early days as we turned in our manuscripts--just weeks after 9/11. Given all that we know now, no doubt revisions are in order, but some of what we wrote then has proven to be on the mark.

A large organization

It was clear from the beginning of our inquiry that the 9/11 attack had been well-planned and carefully prepared. It differed radically from earlier terrorist attacks in its scale and it could have been carried out only by a large and sophisticated organization.

Commission], *The Ground Truth: The Untold Story of America Under Attack on 9/11*. New York: Riverhead Book, 2009.

² Gideon Rose and James F. Hoge, Jr. (eds.), *How Did This Happen? Terrorism and the New War*. New York: Public Affairs, 2001.

The attackers achieved surprise, but the identity of the group responsible was not a surprise. We knew quickly from intelligence sources that al Qaeda, a terrorist group led by Osama bin Laden, who had earlier declared war on the United States, was responsible. The same organization had already carried out a number of major attacks on American targets. We knew from these previous attacks that years went into the planning and preparation of such large-scale operations.

The 9/11 operation was an audacious and ambitious plot that involved coordinated hijackings of four commercial airliners, turning them into guided missiles aimed at the economic and political symbols of American power—the World Trade Center Towers, the Pentagon, and the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. The first three airliners reached their targets, while the fourth plane failed because passengers fought the hijackers to regain control. The plane crashed in Pennsylvania. The attacks were aimed at killing as many people as possible, causing casualties in the thousands.

We had seen suicide attacks before involving one or two persons, but an operation involving groups of suicide attackers was unprecedented. Psychologically damaged young men willing to strap on a suicide vest or drive an explosive-laden truck into a nearby target were—and still are—available, but reliable suicide attackers who remained determined and disciplined at great distance from their base for extended periods, including some who would train to fly commercial airliners, were a rarer commodity. Mobilizing 19 of them would require a much larger human reservoir than that of any earlier terrorist organization.

To plan the operation, collect intelligence, select and recruit the operatives, prepare and deploy them, and conduct reconnaissance and rehearsals would take time. To accomplish this while simultaneously planning and conducting other major terrorist operations was far beyond the capacity of a gang of fanatics operating out of a few hideouts. The attributes of the 9/11 attack required the kind of capabilities seen only in wartime commando raids that reflected national efforts or in a handful of operations carried out by the largest state-supported terrorist groups.³ The attack required a

³ Pete DeLeon, Brian Michael Jenkins, Konrad Kellen, Joseph Krofcheck, *Attributes of Potential Adversaries of U.S. Nuclear Programs*. Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 1978. The researchers examined the attributes of various categories of adversaries that could be viewed as analogs to potential attackers of U.S. nuclear facilities, including sophisticated criminal heists, terrorist assaults, military commando raids, industrial sabotage, and symbolic bombings. Criminal heists displayed detailed

hierarchy, specialization by function, compartmentalized planning of separate operations in various stages of preparation, and a global network. The detailed plan required the collection and utilization of detailed intelligence and, to conceal the operation, a concurrent counterintelligence effort.⁴ That, in turn, required an understanding of the intelligence procedures of the adversary and sophisticated assessments of vulnerabilities in the civil aviation system—the 9/11 attack required an enterprise.

That level of organization, in turn, required ample financial resources, a continuing cash flow, and a structure in place to move the money. In my 2001 chapter, I previously estimated that “a few hundred thousand dollars would cover the September 11 operation.”⁵ According to the 9/11 Commission, the attack cost al Qaeda somewhere between \$400,000 and \$500,000.⁶

It is important, however, to focus not only on the direct cost of the operation itself, such as the hijackers’ travel and living expenses, but also on the broader costs of building and maintaining the organization and infrastructure that was essential to the attack. According to a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimate, al Qaeda was spending about \$30 million a year to sustain its operations before 9/11, but this estimate admittedly was based upon incomplete information.⁷ Other estimates put al Qaeda’s annual budget at the time of the 9/11 attack at \$50 million.⁸

A former al Qaeda operative-turned-informant who had access to the details of al Qaeda’s global banking networks reportedly described the organization’s financial structure as resembling that of an international

reconnaissance—often inside information, technical sophistication, but unwillingness to accept high risk. Terrorist assaults went after easy targets and therefore were generally less sophisticated, but terrorists had a much higher willingness to accept risk, including in some cases to engage in suicide attacks. Wartime commando raids were the most formidable. They could draw on national resources, demonstrated careful planning, and were carried out by individuals willing to accept high risks, but were still not suicidal.

⁴ Gaetano Joe Ilardi, “The 9/11 attacks—A Study of Al Qaeda’s Use of Intelligence and Counterintelligence,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, March 2009.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10576100802670803>

⁵ *How Did This Happen?* op.cit.

⁶ *9/11 Commission Report*, op.cit.

⁷ “Al Qaeda’s Means and Methods to Raise, Move, and Use Money,” Terrorist Financing Staff Monograph, 9/11 Commission. https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/staff_statements/911_TerrFin_Ch2.pdf

⁸ Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* New York: Columbia University Press, 2002

<https://media.defense.gov/2019/Apr/11/2002115483/-1/-1/0/18KILLINGINTHENameOfGOD.PDF>

conglomerate.⁹ Compared to today's national defense budgets, an annual budget of \$50 million may seem modest, but al Qaeda did not invest in costly weapons systems, and it did not have to maintain costly military bases or large facilities. The primary purpose of its budget was operations—delivering death to unbelievers.

Escalating terrorist violence was a long-term trend

The 9/11 attack reflected long-term trends and included elements that had been seen before, but not in combination. While the 9/11 attack was unprecedented, its parts were not. Terrorist plots to kill thousands, coordinated multi-part operations, commercial airliners as a target and vector of attack, suicide pilots, threats to crash hijacked planes into buildings, the World Trade Center as a terrorist target—all had antecedents.

The 9/11 attack was obviously intended to kill thousands, and it succeeded, although the casualties were not as numerous as had been initially imagined. The final official figure of persons believed killed in the World Trade Center is 2,606. A total of 2,977 people were killed during the 9/11 attacks, including those who died in the attack in Washington DC and the passengers and crew on board the four hijacked airplanes. The terrorists had intended to kill more.¹⁰ But many more have died since then as a result of the attack.

Deaths in the thousands from a single terrorist operation were unprecedented, but it was a continuation of a long-term escalation in terrorist violence. The terrorist groups of the 1970s were motivated by political ideologies and operated under self-imposed constraints. They had

⁹ Jane Mayer, "Junior: The clandestine life of America's top Al Qaeda source," *New Yorker*, September 11, 2006. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/09/11/junior>

¹⁰ There was a lot we still did not know when *How Did This Happen* was published. Even the number of people killed in the attack was still uncertain for some time after 9/11 because we did not know exactly how many people had been in the towers when the first plane struck the North Tower at 8:46 in the morning. I initially cited the figure of 5,000 deaths, which was the latest estimate available when I turned in my chapter. Normally at that time, there would have been 15,000 to 20,000 people in the towers, most just arriving for work. Later estimates put the total present that morning at between 15,000 and 17,000, but in the days immediately after the attack we had no idea how many of them had been able to escape before the buildings collapsed. Initially, 10,000 were feared dead. By September 21, this number had dropped to 6,300 as the whereabouts of additional individuals was confirmed. By October 11, the estimate had dropped to 4,500. By December, the number dropped below 3,000. See also: Margaret Talbot, "The Lives They Lived: 3,225 (at last count), D. Sept. 11, 2001, Order of Magnitude," *The New York Times Magazine*, December 30, 2001. <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/30/magazine/the-lives-they-lived-3225-at-last-count-d-sept-11-2001-order-of-magnitude.html>

the capability to kill more, but they worried that wanton violence would alienate their perceived constituencies or could provoke a public backlash, which, in turn, could unleash government crackdowns that they might not survive. They killed in dramatic fashion, but their primary goal was creating alarm to attract attention to themselves and their causes rather than merely causing a high body count.

This changed in the 1980s when groups increasingly motivated by proclaimed religious beliefs began to appear, mainly in the Middle East.¹¹ These beliefs reflected historical experiences and current events, which produced ideologies promoting endless religious war between true believers and the “Jewish-Christian alliance” as their proponents labeled it.

People convinced that they have the mandate of God to kill their foes, who they portray as enemies of God, have fewer moral qualms about mass murder and care little about constituents on earth. Al Qaeda’s official publications over the years have sought to justify mass violence against civilians—deaths in the millions, including women and children, infidels and even Muslims who do not share their extremist views.¹² As a consequence, achieving a high body count was portrayed by al Qaeda’s fanatics not merely as punishment of Islam’s enemies, but as a way of pleasing God. And operational success, measured in blood, would also represent divine intervention, proof that God was on the side of the attackers.

The bloodiest incidents of terrorism until the late 1970s resulted in tens of fatalities. This escalated to hundreds of fatalities in the bloodiest terrorist attacks from 1978 through the 1980s. The upper limits of terrorist attacks

¹¹ The escalation of terrorism and reasons for it are discussed in Brian Michael Jenkins, *Unconquerable Nation: Knowing Our Enemy, Strengthening Ourselves*. Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2006. p. 9.

¹² Bin Laden’s “declaration of war” in 1998 stated that it was the individual duty of Muslims to murder Americans anywhere on earth. In a subsequent interview, he stated that al Qaeda did not differentiate between military or civilians—“they are all targets.” *9/11 Commission Report*, op.cit. The intention to seek mass casualties appears in bin Laden’s 1998 statement that acquiring and using weapons of mass destruction was his duty. Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, “Al Qaeda’s Pursuit of Weapons of Mass Destruction,” *Foreign Policy*, January 25, 2010. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/01/25/al-qaedas-pursuit-of-weapons-of-mass-destruction/>

Abu Musab al-Suri, one of al Qaeda’s top planners in the 1990s who was captured in 2005, tells authorities that al Qaeda made a mistake by not using weapons of mass destruction on 9/11. Mowatt-Larssen, op.cit. Although al Qaeda did not have nuclear weapons, it did contemplate terrorist plots involving spreading radioactive material. Later fatwahs solicited by al Qaeda claim that al Qaeda is justified in killing millions of Americans. These reflect the mindset of the group. Brian Michael Jenkins, *Will Terrorists Go Nuclear?* Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2008..

remained in the hundreds during the 1990s although terrorist attacks with a hundred or more deaths became more common. On 9/11, the number of fatalities crossed into the thousands.

Terrorists make commercial aviation part of the battlefield

The phenomenon of terrorism in its contemporary form emerged in the late 1960s with a series of spectacular attacks. Airline hijacking entered the terrorist repertoire in July 1968 when members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked an Israeli El Al airliner and forced it to fly to Algiers where they released the non-Israeli passengers, but demanded the release of convicted Arab prisoners held by Israel in return for the safe release of the Israeli passengers and crew.¹³

The episode, which lasted 40 days, when the remaining passengers were released, was not the first hijacking of a commercial airliner. After World War II, hijacking had often been employed as a means to escape from the Soviet Union. And during the 1960s, flights in the United States were hijacked by individuals wanting to fly to Cuba. But the El Al incident was the first hijacking that involved political demands beyond asylum and it set off a wave of terrorist hijackings. The PFLP struck again in August 1969, when it hijacked a TWA plane to Damascus, en route from Rome to Tel Aviv.

In September 1970, the PFLP hijacked three commercial airliners and flew them to an airfield in Jordan that was under Palestinian control. As part of the same operation, a fourth plane was hijacked to Egypt. A fifth hijacking was foiled when the hijackers were shot by Israeli air marshals while trying to take control of an El Al plane. Airline hijackings were becoming increasingly common. Between 1968 and 1972, hijacking attempts averaged one every six days.¹⁴

Airline sabotage entered the terrorist playbook in February 1970, when another Palestinian group planted a bomb aboard a Swissair flight from Zurich to Tel Aviv. The explosion caused the plane to crash, killing all 47

¹³ David B. Green, "This Day in Jewish History/The First and Only El Al Hijacking," *Haaretz*, July 23, 2013. [tz.com/jewish/.premium-this-day-the-first-and-only-el-al-hijacking-1.5298481](https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/.premium-this-day-the-first-and-only-el-al-hijacking-1.5298481)

¹⁴ Roland Hughes, "TWA85: 'The World's longest and most spectacular hijacking,'" BBC News, October 26, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-48069272>

persons aboard. Switzerland's arrest and conviction of three Palestinians made it a target for retaliation.¹⁵

In May 1972, three members of the Japanese Red Army, recruited by a Palestinian group, arrived at Tel Aviv's airport on a flight from Rome. Taking automatic weapons and hand grenades out of the their hand luggage, they attacked passengers and airport staff, killing 26 people and wounding 80 people, many of them Puerto Ricans on their way to the Holy Land. It was not merely the scale of the carnage of the event that attracted attention, but its international complexity. How was it that Japanese terrorists came to Israel to kill Puerto Ricans on behalf of Palestinians?¹⁶

Modern jet air travel, which had expanded rapidly in the 1970s, offered terrorists worldwide mobility. Terrorists could board an airplane in one country, fly to another to hijack an airliner, and then fly to a third country. Commercial airliners also provided terrorists with nationally-labeled containers of hostages to bargain for or victims to boast about. Airlines and airports found themselves on the front line of a global conflict. As recent events attest, that is still the case.

Smuggling bombs aboard commercial airliners enabled terrorists to achieve the higher body counts they sought. In September 1974, a TWA flight en route from Tel Aviv to New York City crashed into the Ionian Sea off the coast of Greece, killing 88 people. Investigators examining the wreckage later found that the crash had been caused by a bomb. A Palestinian group was suspected. This was the deadliest terrorist attack to date.¹⁷

In December 1977, the death toll from a single terrorist incident climbed to 100 when members of the Japanese Red Army hijacked a Malaysian Airlines flight from Penang to Kuala Lumpur. What exactly happened will

¹⁵ Brian Michael Jenkins, "Aircraft Sabotage," in Paul Wilkinson and Brian Michael Jenkins (eds.), *Aviation Terrorism and Security*, London: Frank Cass, 1998.

¹⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, *Emergence of the Japanese Red Army*, November 1974 (approved for release 1987). https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000105163.pdf See also: P.G. Steinhoff, "Portrait of a Terrorist—An Interview with Kozo Okamoto [the sole surviving attacker]," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 6, No. 9, September 1976.

¹⁷ U.S. National Transportation Safety Board, *Aircraft Accident Report: Trans World Airlines, Inc. Boeing 707-331B N8734 in the Ionian Sea, September 8, 1974*. March 26, 1975. <https://books.google.com/books?id=z-vsilHoSdgC&pg=RA12-PA1&lpg=RA12-PA1&dq=1974+crash+of+tw+flight+841&source=bl&ots=ICr2oCgL3J&sig=ACfU3U21MXYOvJWjA7WUg-ZUIP1ALzlxgQ&hl=en&ppis=c&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjS0J-lpoboAhUOFjQIHwWDDeo4HhDoATAJegQICAB#v=onepage&q=1974%20crash%20of%20tw+flight%20841&f=false>

probably never be known, but pilots reportedly radioed that the plane had been hijacked by Japanese Red Army members. Cockpit recordings suggest that the pilots had been shot and the plane crashed.

The deadliest act of terrorism involving aviation prior to the 9/11 attack occurred in June 1985, when Sikh extremists bombed an Air India flight flying from Montreal to London, killing all 329 people on board. On the same day, the same group attempted to sabotage another Air India flight scheduled to depart from Tokyo, but the device they planted exploded prematurely, killing two baggage handlers. This remained the deadliest act of terrorism involving aviation until the 9/11 attack.¹⁸ Further incidents of sabotage occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, including the 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103, which killed 270 persons.

A coordinated multi-part attack

It is difficult to kill many people at once. The upper limit of casualties from terrorist attacks involving large vehicle bombs or bombs smuggled aboard airliners appears to be around a few hundred. Massacres involving corralled victims and large numbers of killers can increase the death toll—for example, the systematic mass murder of 7,800 Bosniak men and boys around Srebrenica in 1995 during the war in Bosnia. But that slaughter involved military units and required a major logistics operation; the killings went on without interruption over a period of days.

For terrorists to achieve higher body counts requires multiple coordinated attacks. On 9/11, four teams of al Qaeda operatives seized control of four airliners, which they aimed at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The fourth plane, which the hijackers intended to fly into another target in Washington crashed in Pennsylvania as passengers fought the hijackers to regain control of the plane.

Multiple coordinated attacks enabled terrorists not only to capture either more hostages or sacrifice more victims, they also attracted more attention, and demonstrated the capacity and skills of the terrorist organization and brought credit to the leaders. Showing off their talent was important to the

¹⁸ Allistair Fitzgerald, *Air Crash Investigations: Mass Murder in the Sky, the Bombing of Air India Flight 182*. Lulu.com, 2011.

operational planners of terrorist attacks while demonstrating their devotion and prowess was extremely important to al Qaeda's operatives.

Multiple coordinated terrorist attacks were not a new phenomenon as we saw in the PFLP's operation to hijack five airliners in 1970. Although it succeeded in taking over only four aircraft, the scale of this operation reflected PFLP's organizational strength and infrastructure.

The PFLP was the second-largest faction in the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). By the late 1960s, it operated from multiple camps in safe territory where it trained thousands of recruits. It established alliances and relationships with other terrorist groups abroad, including the Japanese Red Army and Germany's Red Army Faction. To support this enterprise, the PFLP drew on financial support from Syria and maintained good relations with the Soviet Union, China, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen.¹⁹

In 1982, another Palestinian terrorist group, the May 15 Organization, attempted to detonate bombs aboard two Pan Am flights. One device failed to detonate. The other exploded midair on a flight between Tokyo and Honolulu, killing one person and injuring 16. The plane, although damaged, was able to land safely. In a distant precedent to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing discussed later in this report. (The same group plotted in 1980 to bomb the Mount Royal Hotel in London. The terrorists hoped to collapse the building, but the device they planted exploded prematurely, causing extensive damage, but killing only the bombmaker.)²⁰

Taking advantage of its organizational strength and global network, al Qaeda and other Islamist extremists who would come together for the 9/11 attack plotted or carried out a number of multiple coordinated attacks in the 1990s. Following the World Trade Center bombing in 1993, a group of extremists hoped to kill thousands by carrying out multiple bombings of various New York landmarks, including the United Nations headquarters, the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels, the George Washington Bridge, the FBI's

¹⁹ Profile: Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine(PFLP), *BBC News*, November 18, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30099510>. See also:

Robert M. Culbert, *The PFLP's Changing Role in the Middle East*. London: Routledge, 1997.

²⁰ Yonah Alexander and Kenneth A. Meyers (eds.), *Terrorism in Europe*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2015.

main New York office, and the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building. The plot was uncovered and thwarted by the FBI.²¹

The plot to bring down 12 jumbo jets

Ramzi Yousef was a Kuwaiti-born militant who had studied electrical engineering in the United Kingdom, learned bombmaking at a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, and had become an international recruiter for the nascent al Qaeda group. He helped assemble the bomb used in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, but escaped the United States hours after the explosion. In 1994, Yousef flew to Manila to meet his uncle, Khaled Sheikh Mohammed.

While the two were in Manila, they plotted the synchronized bombing of 12 jumbo jets flying across the Pacific. The plan involved five operatives who would fan out to airports in Asia to plant concealable bombs containing liquid nitroglycerin aboard U.S. carriers. Similar to the 1982 bombing attempt, the devices would be timed to detonate while the planes were flying over the Pacific. The operation was reportedly financed in part by bin Laden and other Islamist extremists.

The plot, which was a direct precursor to the 9/11 operation, involved extensive assessments of vulnerabilities in the civil aviation system that could be exploited to commit acts of mass terrorism. The plotters began testing airport security in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Manila, and Seoul and later tested their explosive devices at targets in Manila and later on a Philippine Air flight from Manila to Tokyo. Yousef boarded the plane and planted the bomb, then left the plane at an interim stop. He chose a location on the Boeing 747 that he believed was directly over the center fuel tank, guaranteeing a massive explosion. This particular plane, however, was configured differently and while the explosion caused extensive damage, the flight crew maintained control and landed the plane.

Before the final synchronized operation could be initiated, a small chemical fire broke out in the apartment of the bombmakers. Suspicious about items the firefighters found when they arrived, police investigated further and

²¹ Robert D. McFadden, "Specter of Terror: The Overview; 8 Seized as Suspects in Plot to bomb New York Targets and Kill Political Figures," *The New York Times*, June 25, 1993.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1993/06/25/nyregion/specter-terror-overview-8-seized-suspects-plot-bomb-new-york-targets-kill.html>

uncovered the plot. Ramzi Yousef escaped again, but was later arrested in Pakistan.

The World Trade Center as a terrorist target

Terrorism is aimed at the people who are witnesses to the carnage, in real time and after. The identities of the victims seldom matter to terrorists—the targets do. Terrorists seek symbolic targets that represent their foes, signal their grievances, or guarantee them widespread attention.

In addition to the World Trade Center, which they have attacked twice, terrorists in the United States have attacked the Statue of Liberty, the United Nations building, the New York Stock Exchange, the Capitol Building, the Pentagon, the headquarters of the CIA, and the U.S. Holocaust Museum. They have plotted to attack the Federal Reserve Building in New York, Citibank in Midtown Manhattan, the Brooklyn Bridge, the George Washington Bridge and the U.S. Bank Tower in Los Angeles (until 2017, the tallest building west of the Mississippi). Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament in London, and the Eiffel Tower in Paris have also appeared in their plots.

Islamist extremists are also iconoclasts committed to destroying what they regard as the objects of worship by idolaters, unbelievers or Muslims they regard as heretics. They have destroyed the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, Christian monasteries and other sites in Syria, and the ancient Muslim shrines of Timbuktu. The destruction of what Islamist fanatics view as idols reflects their ideology. Visually spectacular attacks also become terrorist recruiting posters. The World Trade Center fulfilled all of these criteria. Not only was it the world's tallest man-made structure, but it symbolized America's leading role in finance and commerce.

The construction of the World Trade Center coincided with the emergence of contemporary international terrorism, with terrorist hijackings, kidnappings, and bombings increasing in Latin America, the Middle East, and Europe. In the early 1970s, the United States was faced with a terrorist threat from both domestic and foreign groups that were responsible for 30 to 40 bombings a year. From almost its opening day in 1973, the World Trade Center was identified as a possible terrorist target.

Some terrorism analysts saw the World Trade Center as a likely location for a terrorist bombing—a symbolic statement against capitalism to many of America’s domestic terrorists who were motivated by New Left ideology. Ted Taylor, a nuclear-weapons designer at Los Alamos Laboratories in New Mexico, worried that terrorists might be able to obtain fissile material and construct a small crude nuclear weapon. As it is recounted in John McPhee’s articles in the *New Yorker*, which appeared in 1972, and his book *The Curve of Binding Energy*, published in 1973, he and Taylor visited the World Trade Center. Standing on the 40th floor, Taylor made quick mental calculations about the effects of detonating a small nuclear device on the towers. “There is no question at all,” he said, “that if someone were to place a half-kiloton bomb [equivalent to 500 tons of TNT—40 times less power than that of the atomic bomb detonated over Hiroshima] on the steps where we came in, the building would fall in the river.”²²

The possibility that terrorists might steal a nuclear weapon or fabricate a crude nuclear device had been a concern at least since the 1960s. In an interview with a Pakistani journalist two months after the 9/11 attack, al Qaeda’s leaders claimed to have nuclear weapons. They did not have them—but in the shadow of 9/11, nothing could be dismissed.

The 1993 bombing

In September 1992, years before his involvement in the plot to bomb 12 airliners in the Pacific, Ramzi Yousef had traveled to the United States from Pakistan, intending to bomb the World Trade Center. Yousef was accompanied by Ahmed Ajaj, a naturalized U.S. citizen who was born in Palestine. Ajaj had left the United States earlier that year to travel to Pakistan, where he tried to get training in bombmaking at the same camp where Yousef had trained, but reportedly he was denied entrance because he lacked a letter of introduction. Ajaj flew to Saudi Arabia, connected with the right people to obtain the necessary endorsement, and returned to take the course.

Yousef and Ajaj arrived on the same flight in New York, but immigration officials became suspicious when Ajaj showed them a crudely altered Swedish passport, which had belonged to another trainee at the training

²² John McPhee, *The Curve of Binding Energy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974.

camp. They inspected Ajaj's luggage where they found more altered passports along with bombmaking manuals. Ajaj was arrested on the spot and went directly from JFK Airport to jail. Yousef, despite the irregularity of his own documents, was allowed to enter the country.

Immediately upon arrival, Yousef contacted Omar Abdel-Rahman, the firebrand imam who presided over a mosque in Jersey City. Abdel-Rahman connected him with a group of local volunteers who would participate in the plot to bomb the World Trade Center.

The decision to target the World Trade Center was driven not only by its symbolic importance, but also by operational considerations. The Twin Towers public subgrade parking garage would allow Yousef to place the bomb at the right place beneath the structure. He intended the explosion to undermine the foundation, causing one tower to topple into the other bringing both down. During the daytime, 50,000 people occupied the towers, but Yousef's hope was that 250,000 would die in the catastrophe he initiated.

A letter mailed by the conspirators at the time of the bombing in 1993 explained their motives. They described themselves at the "fifth battalion in the Liberation Army" and claimed that the bombing was a response to "American political, economical [sic], and military support to Israel...and to the rest of the dictator countries in the region". More attacks would occur, they warned, unless the United States ended its support for Israel and ceased interfering in the internal affairs of any other Middle Eastern country.²³

The 1,500-pound bomb explosion created a vast underground crater but the structure held. Six persons were killed and more than a thousand were injured, most of them due to smoke inhalation and injuries suffered in the evacuation of the towers. That evacuation took more than seven hours as tens of thousands of people struggled down pitch black stairways.

²³ John Dwyer and David Kocieniewski, Deidre Murphy, and Peg Tyre, *Two Seconds Under the World: Terror Comes to America—The Conspiracy Behind the World Trade Center Bombing*. New York: Ballentine Books, 1994. See also: Charles J. Shields, *The 1993 World Trade Center Bombing*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002.

The bombing prompted a thorough review of security, including the creation of a “red team” to explore future threats. One of the scenarios postulated by the team was a plane crashing into one of the towers. Those charged with security had no solution for dealing with this possibility—no one considered it reasonable to mount missile batteries on the towers to shoot at incoming aircraft, but it was possible to get people out faster. The stairwells were positively pressured to ensure clean air, emergency lighting was installed, and tenants were obliged to nominate evacuation marshals and conduct regular drills. As a consequence, more people got out of the towers on the morning of 9/11 than was initially imagined.

All but one of the American contingent of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing conspirators were promptly identified and arrested. However, Yousef escaped to Pakistan and then joined his uncle Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in Manila where the two plotted to assassinate President Clinton and the Pope, blow up airliners heading to the United States, and crash a plane into CIA headquarters. When the airline bombing plot was thwarted by Philippine police, Yousef and Mohammed fled to Pakistan, but Pakistani authorities quickly arrested Yousef and extradited him to the United States.

For security reasons, Yousef, now in FBI custody, was flown by helicopter to the Metropolitan correctional center in Lower Manhattan. The World Trade Center was clearly visible to the passengers in the helicopter flying down the Hudson River. The federal agent with Yousef pointed out that the World Trade Center was still standing. Yousef responded, “It would not have been, had we had more money.”²⁴

Some see Yousef’s response as a chilling omen of 9/11, but it merits further thought. More money for the 1993 bombing might have bought more explosives, although the van the plotters rented could only carry so much. A second bomb was a possibility, but what Yousef needed was not just more money, but more support, more human resources to select from, more time to train a team, a safe place to do so, and a more robust organizational infrastructure to support a more sophisticated attack. What he needed was the support of a larger organization.

²⁴ Interview with Lewis D. Schiliro [former Assistant Director of the FBI in charge of the New York Office], PBS *Frontline*, 2002.

The first meeting between Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Osama bin Laden

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed remained at large and on the run, but no less determined to continue plotting terrorist attacks. He needed to connect with an organization that could provide him with security and the resources he needed to pursue his ambitious schemes. Not an especially pious man, Mohammed does not appear to have been driven by religious devotion or ideological fervor. A craftsman of violence, he was more interested in the what, where, and how than in why. In 1996, he traveled to Afghanistan to meet Osama bin Laden.

Osama bin Laden had come to Pakistan for the first time in the 1980s to establish guest houses and training camps for the thousands of Arab foreign fighters who joined the Afghan resistance after the Soviet invasion in 1979. He was one of many. Muslim religious leaders qualified the resistance as a jihad to defend Islam against foreign aggression. Thousands volunteered.

The defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan led to changes in the Islamist movement. There were differing ideas about the future of the jihad after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Once the Soviets left, many of the external actors supporting the resistance considered their primary mission accomplished although some participated in efforts to broker deals among the still warring factions. But many of the Arab volunteers resisted demobilization.

Some of the Arab volunteers determined to stay in Afghanistan to ensure that an authentic Islamic government emerged from the chaos and conflict that followed the Soviet departure. In fact, many of the Arab fighters in Afghanistan had nowhere else to go. Applauded for volunteering to fight the infidel invaders, they were prevented from returning by governments that worried they might come back with subversive ideas about future jihads in the countries they had left.

Some of the Afghan Arabs saw Israel as no different from the Soviet invaders and wanted to refocus their efforts on liberating Palestine from the Jews and their Western colonial backers. If Israel was a hard target, the Palestinian terrorist campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s showed that

Israel's Western backers were still vulnerable as the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993 would demonstrate.

But still others, like Osama bin Laden, harbored grander visions. Even before the last Soviet soldier marched out of Afghanistan, bin Laden saw the Afghan resistance as merely the first phase of a global jihad. Its Arab veterans would become the cadre of a vast multinational host that would defend the faithful, bring down the Infidel aggressors, and bring an end to Western influence in the Muslim world.

The camps, a global recruiting network, and lists of volunteers and supporters that he had assembled to support the resistance had to be preserved. They would become "the base"—al Qaeda—for the expanded struggle. There would be no demobilization, but rather a global jihad. Bin Laden was determined to lead it himself.

Al Qaeda's worldview

The Islamists or Salafists—those committed to a restoration of the original or purer form of Islam that prevailed at the time of the Prophet—who gravitated toward al Qaeda's galaxy increasingly began to think of themselves as a jihadist vanguard. The term "Salafist" comes from "Salaf," the first three generations of Muslims including the Prophet who practiced a strict, uncorrupted form of Islam.²⁵ Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi sect, whose worldwide missionary activities were sponsored by the monarchy, could be called Salafist or Salafi. Salafi militants actively participate in politics in order to promote the protection and spread of Islam. Jihadism was another dimension of Salafist militancy. Not satisfied with preaching and political activism, jihadists carried Islamist militancy into the realm of violent action.

The Quran prescribes five pillars of Islam: accepting and proclaiming their faith—"There is no God but Allah and the Prophet is his messenger";

²⁵ Shadi Hamid and Rashid Dar, "Islamism, Salafism, and Jihadism: A primer," *Markaz*, July 15, 2006., Washington DC: The Brookings Institute. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/> See also: Joas Wagemakers, "Salafism," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2016. https://www.academia.edu/27786496/Salafism_2016 and; Nelly Lahoud, "The Evolution of Modern Jihadism," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2016. <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-68>

prayer in the prescribed manner five times a day; charity; fasting during Ramadan, and; making the pilgrimage to Mecca. Jihadists elevate jihad to a sixth pillar.

As described in the Quran, jihad can mean a spiritual struggle to improve one's soul or it can mean taking up arms to defend or advance the faith. For the jihadists, it means taking up arms, as a duty to God. Jihads had been waged throughout the history of Islam. In the 19th and early 20th century, many jihads were proclaimed in response to Western colonialism as European empires spread through Asia and Africa.

Al Qaeda promoted a radical interpretation. According to its worldview, Islam was under continuous assault by the West—Jews and Crusaders who threatened to destroy the religion by occupying its lands and corrupting the souls of its believers. Jihad was necessary. Individuals need not wait for the call of their leaders to wage war. Joining jihad was an individual obligation that applied to everyone everywhere. And because they claimed that the West was engaged in an attack on the Muslim world, they claimed theirs was a defensive jihad and that there were fewer constraints on those who could be killed. It would be a total war—civilians would not be spared.

Joining jihad offered rewards to the individual, immediate and in the afterlife. Demonstrated devotion to God would shield one against the corrupting influences of Western culture. Killing infidels would bring status to the recruit, allow him into the company of warriors, enlist him in an epic struggle, offer opportunities to demonstrate one's own prowess, avenge those who had suffered injustice and atrocities at the hands of Islam's enemies, end feelings of helplessness and humiliation, and restore honor. Paradise, often described in earthly terms, was guaranteed to those who died in jihad.²⁶ Some believe that joining jihad could even expunge the sins of departed relatives and help them advance to paradise.

Al Qaeda's message appealed especially to those who were struggling, who were drifting and sought greater meaning in life, who had suffered insult and were angry, who were bored and craved action. Al Qaeda was all about action. Continued operations, especially spectacular attacks,

²⁶ The worldview and recruiting appeal of al Qaeda are discussed in Jenkins, *Unconquerable Nation*, op.cit. See also: Youssef H. Abou-Enein, *Militant Islamist Ideology: Understanding the Global Threat*, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010.

would demonstrate resolve and capabilities, expose enemy vulnerabilities, inspire hope, attract more recruits and bring financial support.

Osama bin Laden made one more significant change to the concept of jihad. While earlier jihads were local, bin Laden saw his in global terms, and that attacking the United States – which he referred to as the head of the snake in diatribes no later than 1992 – was the highest order priority.

Bin Laden considered the Palestinian struggle important, but it was not his paramount objective. And he agreed that regimes in the Muslim world that failed to govern in accordance with shariah were corrupt and had to be destroyed before the believers could defeat the Jews and Crusaders that threatened Islam. But he reversed the sequence. The United States—"the far enemy" was not the final objective after "the near enemies" had been routed. It was the first objective. Bin Laden believed that if the United States could be driven out of the Middle East, the jihad would triumph.

This was a revolutionary, and remarkably ambitious, approach. Instead of dividing resources in local wars against U.S.-backed regimes, al Qaeda would directly attack the United States. It is grandiose, but one can see how it emerged from the experience in Afghanistan where Muslim fighters assembled from around the world to drive the Soviet forces out of the country. And soon after their withdrawal, the Soviet Union itself collapsed. If the jihad could bring down one superpower, why could it not bring down another?

True, the United States was a formidable power, but to bin Laden and like-minded Islamists its military strength was undermined by America's materialism and sensitivity to casualties. The jihadists did not shrink from martyrdom. According to bin Laden's assessment, the spiritual superiority of the believers would triumph over America's technological superiority.

To prove his point, bin Laden pointed to several precedents. Several months after the 1983 bombing of the U.S. marine barracks in Beirut, the United States withdrew its forces from Lebanon—it never went back. Following the death of 17 Americans in the 1993 battle of Mogadishu, the United States again promptly withdrew its forces. The lesson bin Laden drew from these examples was that one spectacular blow would suffice to drive the Americans out of the Middle East. It is this thinking that lay behind 9/11.

That al Qaeda could defeat the United States clearly stretched credulity, but was it any more fantastic than the triumph of the Prophet over militarily superior foes in the 7th century? Al Qaeda's strategists believed in divine intervention. Their notion of strategy was fatalistic. It was their duty to keep fighting. The outcome was in God's hands.

Analysts in the West, however, still debate this point. Enlisting bin Laden's own words, some say that bin Laden seriously imagined that 9/11 would prompt an American departure. Others argue that bin Laden's words did not reflect his true intentions, which were to inflict a blow that almost certainly would provoke a fierce American response. In response to 9/11, America would invade Afghanistan, thereby being drawn into a protracted exhausting military struggle that Americans would tire of.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and bin Laden's proposal to Saudi Arabia

In 1990, Iraq's armed forces invaded Kuwait, territory it had claimed that had been carved off by British imperialists. The invasion imperiled the other Gulf monarchies, Saudi Arabia in particular. Osama bin Laden proposed that his army of jihadists would defend the Kingdom. The Saudi government instead allowed U.S. forces to enter the Kingdom. The presence of infidel troops on the soil of Islam's holiest sites incensed bin Laden, especially when the American troops remained after the Gulf War. It underscored his determination to attack the United States

Bin Laden briefly returned to Afghanistan, then moved to a new base in Sudan in 1992. Evidence indicated he began setting up an infrastructure. He invested heavily in building projects, assisting the new government, which had imposed strict Islamic law on the country. Many of the workers on bin Laden's projects were Arab veterans from Afghanistan. During this period, bin Laden was also building his army, creating training camps, seeking weapons, and developing connections with other Islamist groups, including the Egyptians that would later join him in Afghanistan. While in Sudan, bin Laden plotted terrorist attacks on U.S. targets.

His activities prompted growing concern in Washington, which put pressure on the Sudanese government, leading to bin Laden's departure from Sudan in 1996. He returned to Afghanistan, most of which by then had come under control of the Taliban. In July 1996, bin Laden declared war on the

United States. It was under these circumstances that he met Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

Al Qaeda's terrorist campaign

Up to then, al Qaeda had carried out only minor attacks. In 1992, bin Laden sponsored the bombing of a hotel in Yemen that was used by American forces on their way to Somalia. A Yemeni employee and an Austrian national died in the explosion, but no Americans were harmed.

In early 1993, bin Laden began to provide training and assistance to Somali tribes opposed to the United Nations' intervention in Somalia, and on October 3 and 4, al Qaeda members participated with Somali tribesmen in an attack of U.S. military personnel in Mogadishu. The battle of Mogadishu, made famous as Blackhawk Down, resulted in the deaths of 18 U.S. soldiers and the wounding of 73 others.²⁷

Bin Laden was thinking big. We know now that while in Sudan, his operatives tried to obtain fissile nuclear material from South Africa to build a nuclear bomb. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed pitched his proposals. Bin Laden thought that flying a small plane into CIA headquarters, one of the ideas left over from the Manila plot, was too paltry. The idea of hijacking multiple commercial airliners and crashing them into American cities was better suited to bin Laden's ambitions, but bin Laden remained cautious. Bin Laden envisioned a spectacular attack but this operation was very complex with a lot of moving parts. It would require a great deal of preparation, careful selection of personnel, training, money, and logistics support and he was acutely aware al Qaeda's limitations.

He invited Khalid Sheikh Mohammed to join the group, but Mohammed declined. The 9/11 Commission Report says that from Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's perspective, "Bin Laden was in the process of consolidating his new position in Afghanistan while hearing out others' ideas, and he had not yet settled on an agenda for future anti-U.S. operations." Mohammed

²⁷ United States District Court, Southern District of New York, Indictment, *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden*. 1998. <https://fas.org/irp/news/1998/11/indict1.pdf>. Some of the information in the indictment was provided by Jamal Ahmed al-Fadl, a former al Qaeda operative who had become an FBI informant.

preferred to remain independent.²⁸ For the time being, the plan, which eventually would become 9/11, was shelved.

While expanding his recruiting and training activities, bin Laden pursued less ambitious terrorist operations. In 1997, bin Laden reportedly helped finance an attack on foreign tourists in Luxor, Egypt that killed 55 people. It was an Egyptian rather than an al Qaeda operation, but the Egyptian jihadists were growing closer to al Qaeda.

The close relationship became apparent in February 1998 when bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri, the leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, published a new fatwa in the name of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders. The two men signed it along with the leader of al-Gamma'a al-Islamaya—another Egyptian Islamist group; the head of the Pakistani Society of Ulemas—a hardline anti-U.S. group, and; the leader of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh.

The declaration stated that the United States had declared war against God and his messenger, and called for the murder of any American, anywhere on earth and warned that there would be no distinction between soldiers and civilians—they are all targets. Action would follow.

In August 1998, al Qaeda's operatives carried out suicide bombings on the American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. More than 200 people, including 12 Americans, died in the explosion in Nairobi, 1,200 were injured. A parked water tanker truck prevented the drivers of the truck bomb from getting too close to the embassy in Dar es Salaam—a total of 11 people died there.

The bombings of the American embassies brought an American military response. Thirteen days after the attacks, the United States fired cruise missiles into an al Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan and destroyed a factory in Sudan believed to be manufacturing chemical weapons.

The U.S. attack caused some casualties, but missed bin Laden and other senior al Qaeda leaders. The embassy bombings, a large-scale simultaneous attack and the failure of the missile strikes enhanced bin

²⁸ 9/11 Commission Report, *op.cit.*

Laden's reputation. More volunteers streamed to his camps in Afghanistan.

The continuing flow of recruits was critical to the organization's growth and cohesion. The growing reservoir also enabled al Qaeda's planners to find and recruit the specific talents needed for ambitious operations. This was a critical component in the preparations for 9/11.

It is difficult to estimate the strength of a terrorist group. Membership is an elastic concept. Shortly after 9/11, the International Institute for Strategic studies estimated that 18,000 recruits had flowed through al Qaeda's training camps. The camps not only provided training in weapons and bomb making, they provided continuous indoctrination. They also created shared hardships, a sense of trust among the recruits, and offered leaders an opportunity to assess an individual's level of skill and commitment. This would be crucial in carrying out an operation where the operatives would be separated from the command and from each other for long periods of time, yet remain dedicated to the mission.

Most importantly, the embassy attacks also persuaded Khalid Sheikh Mohammed that Osama bin Laden was serious about his intentions and he accepted bin Laden's invitation to join the group sometime in late 1998 or early 1999.. Shortly thereafter, bin Laden advised Mohammed in Kandahar that the "planes operation," as it was called, was a go.

Planning the "planes operation"

We don't know all of the details of the planning and preparations for the 9/11 attack. The 19 hijackers were killed. Mohammed Atef, al Qaeda's military chief and a key figure in the planning, was killed in an air strike shortly after 9/11. Osama bin Laden was killed years later. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was captured in 2003, but transcripts of his interrogation have not been released. Walid bin Attash and Ramzi Binalshibh, who played lesser but still important roles in 9/11, also remain in custody in Guantanamo, facing trial in 2021, but apart from the memoranda prepared for the tribunal, their accounts are also unavailable. There are tens of thousands of pages of case related material. It simply does not exist in the public domain and cannot be discussed publicly by those who have seen it

Nonetheless, owing to the massive investigation conducted by the FBI, the work of the staff of the 9/11 Commission, and additional information published since 9/11, we have considerable detail about the roughly 28 months between bin Laden's formal approval to proceed with the operation and the attack.

The evolution of a terrorist attack from an idea to an actual operation is a process. Ideas evolve over time, based on accumulated knowledge, assessments of challenges and how to overcome them, and lessons learned from other operations, among other factors. This process requires time, space, and resources. Once terrorist planners start seriously thinking about what they really might do, the planning process reduces grandiose ambitions to more realistic operations within the capacity of the group. Armies do not expect to win every battle, but for terrorists, failure is worse than death. This imposes caution.

The planning for 9/11 followed the same pattern. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's original proposal was steadily modified to increase its chances of success. Mohammed initially gave himself a starring role in the attack. His plan called for ten planes to be hijacked. Nine of them would be crashed into cities in the United States. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed would be aboard the tenth. He would kill all of the male passengers, land and make a public statement to the media explaining the reason for the attack, then release the women and children. This part of the plan was abandoned.

The idea of hijacking ten planes, some of them in Asia, and crashing them into cities on both coasts of the United States was also eventually dropped as too complicated. Alternatives were considered. Planes hijacked in Asia might be flown into U.S. targets in Japan or South Korea. The west coast cities might be hit in a second wave of attacks. It is not clear how this analytical process evolved or why certain ideas were deemed unworkable or less preferable, but the refinement that occurred does underscore the careful analysis and assessments that are required for an operation like the 9/11 attack. In the end, the final plan settled on crashing four or five planes, depending on the availability of pilots, into targets on the East Coast. The final number was four. Three made it to their intended targets.

The targets chosen were the Pentagon and the Capitol Building (the probable target of the fourth plane that crashed in Pennsylvania) and the

Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. In addition to the symbolism already discussed, the fact that the towers remained standing after the 1993 bombing gave hitting them again special status. Terrorists will go out of their way to attack the same target again, even when other easier targets were available, to demonstrate that they remain determined and can overcome heightened security to hit what they want.

Bin Laden may also have seen a unique propaganda opportunity in toppling the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. He used the term “Hubal” in speaking about America.²⁹ It was an arcane reference that most Americans missed, but it recalled the actions of the Prophet when he conquered Mecca in the 7th century. The people of Mecca at the time were pagans who worshipped 360 idols arrayed at the city’s center. The highest ranking of these was Hubal, a large statue of human figure, made of carnelian.

One of Mohammed’s first acts after he entered the city was to knock over Hubal and smash the idols. The destruction of the World Trade Center would emulate the Prophet’s toppling and smashing of the idols in Mecca, further elevating bin Laden’s and al Qaeda’s reputations as the vanguards of the new jihad.

There was also an operational reason for choosing the World Trade Center. Its Twin Towers rose far above the skyline and on a clear day were visible for miles making them easy targets for the two pilots who could hit them at a near level angle

Recruiting the operatives

In the following sections of this report, I overview the recruitment, selection, training, deployment, travels, and preparations of the 9/11 plot participants. The 9/11 Commission staff studied these topics in detail, and the Final Report of the 9/11 Commission presented a detailed discussion of these issues. On the issues of the participants’ backgrounds, recruitment, selection, training, deployment, travels in relation to the plot, arrivals in the U.S., flight training in the U.S., coordination with one another in the U.S., selection of flights, preparations in the days immediately before 9/11,

²⁹ *Text of Bin Laden's October 7, 2001 Speech*, Osama bin Laden Rutgers University, <http://crab.rutgers.edu/~goertzel/binLadenTV.htm>

navigation of airport security on 9/11, and actions aboard the planes, I incorporate the discussion from the 9/11 Final Report, rather than repeating it *ad nauseum* here.³⁰

Human resources were a major constraint. To carry out an operation of the scale and complexity of the 9/11 operation, as initially envisioned by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, would require dozens of operatives. While the plan still contemplated hijackings in Asia and America, they would be spread over two continents.

Men willing to die were in abundant supply, but never before had any terrorist organization mobilized so many suicide operatives to work together in a single operation. Normally, suicide attackers were used as weapons. Human guidance systems, equipped and directed by others close by, they played little role in the planning of the operation. They were usually sent into action in ones or twos.

The 9/11 attackers were not cannon fodder. They had to live abroad for an extended period. At least some of them had to speak or learn English—the international language of air traffic control, live on their own, get drivers licenses not only to drive but to use to board planes rather than attract attention by using Middle Eastern passports. They had to reconnoiter airports, observe security procedures, learn to fly large commercial jet aircraft. Even something as seemingly simple as gaining entry into the United States without arousing suspicion posed a challenge and required a large pool of recruits, given that many jihadists' travels were disqualifying.

Those selected for the 9/11 operation would be separated from the central command for months during which they would have to maintain discipline and, despite second thoughts, temptations, or other distractions, remain dedicated to accomplishing the mission, which they knew would end in their deaths. Willing martyrs were a commodity. What the 9/11 planners needed were a more precious commodity. Careful selection and intense indoctrination were crucial to reliability. This is where the size of the organization matters. Al Qaeda could draw from a reservoir of thousands.

³⁰ See discussions of those issues in Chapter 1, section 1.1, Chapter 5, section 5.3, and Chapter 7 of the Final Report. This report does not, however, address issues pertaining to the support network for the hijackers involving Omar al Bayoumi and Fahad al Thumairy, which I understand are the subject of ongoing discovery.

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed told his questioners at Guantanamo that he initially wanted 25 to 26 pilots in place in the United States. It is not clear why he thought he needed this many unless he wanted reserves in place for future attacks or was anticipating a high rate of dropouts. He mentioned that some of the candidates for the suicide missions withdrew under pressure from their families. We do not know if any of those recruited for the 9/11 attack deserted the operation in the final months. At least one may have had second thoughts, but peer pressure kept him in.

However, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed said that he had also trained the Shoe Bomber who, three months after 9/11, attempted to bring down a flight from Paris to Miami. We learned four years later that there had been a second shoe bomber who was to blow up another plane flying to the United States from Amsterdam. He changed his mind and did not go ahead with the attack.³¹

In addition to the pilots selected for the 9/11 attack were so-called muscle hijackers whose role would be to help take over the plane and keep the passengers under control while al Qaeda's pilots guided the planes to their targets. Thirteen Saudis performed this role on 9/11. Al Qaeda had sent a 14th, but he was denied entry. That meant three to four muscle hijackers for each of the planes. Mohammed's original plan called for ten airplanes, which would have required a total of 30 to 40 additional men, bringing the total needed to approximately 50.

All of those recruited for the operation would have to obtain visas to enter the United States. That narrowed the pool considerably. Iraqis would face extreme suspicion. Yemenis were also unlikely to be granted entry visas. The reason was not necessarily because they represented a security threat, but that Yemenis were more likely to overstay their visas and seek employment in the United States. Twelve of the 13 muscle hijackers were from Saudi Arabia. Of the original six selected to be pilots, two were Saudis, one was Egyptian, one was from the United Arab Emirates, and one was from Lebanon.

³¹ "British Man Says He Plotted With 'Shoe Bomber,'" *The New York Times*, February 28, 2005. <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/28/international/middleeast/british-man-says-he-plotted-with-shoe-bomber.html>

Pilot selection

Osama bin Laden nominated four potential suicide operatives. Two were Saudi nationals, whom bin Laden seemed to favor, named Khalid al Mihdhar and Nawaf al Hazmi. Both were trusted veterans of the fighting in Bosnia, and eager to attack the United States, and they already held U.S. visas. These two would be the first ones to travel to the United States. Their poor English prevented them from completing flight training, but they participated in the hijacking of Flight 77, which crashed into the Pentagon.

The other two proposed by bin Laden were Yemeni nationals, which would make it difficult for them to get U.S. visas. They ended up playing a supporting role in preparing the attack and helped train the others. Khalid Sheik Mohammed later sent them to Southeast Asia where he intended to use them in the second wave of attacks, which by then had been modified from hijackings to sabotage of airliners by suicide bombers.

The initial recruits were sent for advanced training at al Qaeda's camp in Mes Aynak, Afghanistan. The course focused on physical fitness, firearms training, close quarters combat, shooting from a motorcycle, and night operations. The training was rigorous and, according to the 9/11 Commission Report, involved extraordinarily physical and mental demands on its participants who had already been vetted for their loyalty and commitment.

Those selected for the 9/11 operations were then sent to a safe house in Karachi, Pakistan where they learned to speak basic English phrases, and received instruction on how to use U.S. telephone books and the Internet, rent apartments, read airline timetables and make travel reservations. They were also taught how to case flights, they played flight simulator games, and they watched films about hijackings.

Millennium plot interlude

During this period, al Qaeda pursued several overlapping operations at one time, an approach that was absolutely essential to achieving its goal of conducting successful high profile terrorist attacks against the United States. As an example, while Khaled Sheikh Mohammed focused his attention on the 9/11 operation and ideas for subsequent hijackings or sabotage of airliners, al Qaeda was also involved in planning and refining

the Millennium Plot. This comprised a series of terrorist attacks that were planned to occur around the millennium celebrations in December 1999 and January 2000.

The component parts were widespread. A terrorist cell in Jordan was tasked to bomb the Radisson Hotel in Amman and tourist sites near the border with Israel. An Algerian operative in Canada was to detonate a large bomb at Los Angeles Airport. Suicide terrorists in Aden were to crash a boat loaded with explosives into an American destroyer, the USS Sullivan, while it was in port refueling. Still other components were to carry out attacks in other countries.

The Millennium Plot was an ambitious undertaking and ended in failure, owing to inadequate security, bad luck, and incompetence. Jordanian intelligence uncovered the plot and arrested most of the key operatives in early December. The car driven by the Algerian operative heading from Canada to Los Angeles was stopped at the U.S. border where a suspicious Customs agent demanded a closer inspection of the vehicle and officials found the bomb components. His arrest alerted U.S. officials to the threat of terrorist operatives in the United States and led to a massive crackdown. The would-be bombers in Aden overloaded explosives into their small boat and it sank immediately upon launching.

The failure of the Millennium Plot cost al Qaeda credibility and operational capabilities. It taught al Qaeda's planners a lesson about overreach and the necessity of close supervision. The 9/11 operation was not abandoned, although the failure of the Millennium Plot may have underscored bin Laden's decision in the spring of 2000 to cancel the Asian component. Nor did al Qaeda abandon the idea of bombing a U.S. warship. The Aden cell revised its calculations, built another bomb, and rammed their boat into the USS Cole in December 2000. By then, al Qaeda's pilots had already arrived in the United States.

The Hamburg Cell joins the plot

Had the 9/11 operation been compelled to rely on raw material the caliber of those first chosen to be the pilots, it is doubtful that the operation would have succeeded, but the 9/11 planners were presented with an unforeseen opportunity in late 1999 when four volunteers from Germany showed up in Afghanistan.

The four had come together in Hamburg, Germany where they were university students. Held together by their extremist views, by the time they arrived in Afghanistan, they were already determined to be jihadist warriors. Initially, they had planned to go to Chechnya, but were persuaded by an al Qaeda operative in Germany that it was difficult to get to Chechnya and that they should go to Afghanistan instead. Three of them were prepared to be jihadist martyrs; the fourth remained more skeptical about sacrificing his life, but was pulled along by the others and on 9/11 flew the hijacked flight 93, which crashed in Pennsylvania.

The 9/11 Commission Report notes that “the speed with which [the four] Atta, Shehhi, Jarrah, and Binalshibh became core members of the 9/11 plot...is remarkable.”³² Even before they met Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Osama bin Laden and Mohammed Atef recruited them for the 9/11 operation. Bin Laden also immediately saw Mohamed Atta as the one he considered most qualified to lead the operation in America.

Unlike the first selectees, the four had university educations and possessed technical knowledge. In fact, Jarrah was studying aerospace engineering. They had lived in Europe, were familiar with Western culture, and spoke languages other than Arabic, including German, French, and with varying degrees of fluency, English. They already held visas for study in Europe, which would make getting into the United States less difficult. Atta was Egyptian, Jarrah from Lebanon, and Mohammed from the United Arab Emirates. Binalshibh was Yemeni, which proved problematic, as U.S. officials turned down his repeated visa applications and he was unable to enter the country.

By mid-2000, it was apparent that Khalid al Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi were not going to be able to complete pilot training. With Binalshibh unable to get a visa, that left al Qaeda with only three pilots. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed would have to scale back the operation. Again, however, the continuing flow of recruits to al Qaeda’s training camps offered a solution. Among the recent arrivals was a young Saudi named Hani Hanjour.

Hanjour had already studied in the United States where he had undergone enough pilot training to obtain a commercial pilot license. In 2000, he

³² 9/11 Commission Report, *op.cit.*

returned to join al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Once he was identified, Mohammed quickly recruited him for the 9/11 operation. Hanjour returned to Saudi Arabia in June 2000, obtained a U.S. student visa, and by December he was in San Diego.

Bin Laden selects the “muscle hijackers”

As pilot issues were being resolved, Osama bin Laden personally selected the muscle hijackers during the summer and early fall of 2000. All but one came from Saudi Arabia. The preponderance of Saudis, according to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, simply reflected the demographics of the population of al Qaeda recruits in Afghanistan—most came from Saudi Arabia. Those picked for the operation had radicalized long before their selection for the 9/11 operation. Some had been sent to al Qaeda by al Qaeda sympathizers who acted as recruiters.

Most came from small towns in poor areas of the Kingdom. They were far less educated than those who were chosen to be the pilots. Few spoke English. They were given additional training, including butchering sheep and camels to practice their knife skills.

Immediately after the 9/11 attack, there was some uncertainty whether the muscle hijackers knew they were on a suicide mission or thought they were merely participating in a regular hijacking. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed indicated in his interrogation that all knew this was suicide attack. Upon arrival at al Qaeda’s camps in Afghanistan, all recruits filled out forms indicating where they came from, their reasons for coming to Afghanistan, how they were recruited, their education, and if they had any special skills. The new arrivals were also asked whether they were prepared to engage in suicide operations. Those who answered yes were sent on to Mohammed Atef for further interviewing. Promising candidates were interviewed personally by bin Laden. If they were chosen, they would then be asked to swear loyalty for a suicide operation.

Those selected for the 9/11 operation were instructed to return to their home countries to get new passports before applying for U.S. visas. The new passports might be then doctored by an al Qaeda unit that specialized in altering passports.

The muscle hijackers traveled from Afghanistan to Karachi, Pakistan and then to the United Arab Emirates. From there, they began arriving in the United States in April 2001. Mohammed Atta was notified of each arrival. He met those arriving in Florida while Hani Hanjour met those arriving in New York or Washington and helped them settle in. By July 2001, all of the 15 muscle hijackers were in the United States. Most of them stayed near Atta in Florida. The rest stayed around Paterson, New Jersey. As late as the summer of 2001, there still appeared to be some uncertainty about the pilots, the number of planes to be hijacked, and the targets.

Zacarias Moussaoui, a French citizen of Moroccan descent, came into Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's orbit in mid-2000. He had radicalized and traveled to Afghanistan in 1998. It is not clear what role Mohamed intended for him. Initially, Moussaoui was sent for flight training in Malaysia, but when he did not find a flight school there he liked, Mohammed called him back to Pakistan and redirected him to take flight training in the United States. It is not clear exactly what al Qaeda intended Moussaoui to do. He may have been a candidate to participate in a possible second wave of attacks.

Moussaoui was sent money allowing him to begin flight training in Oklahoma in February 2001. He did not perform well and left the school in May 2001. He then enrolled in a flight school in Minnesota. His unusual behavior aroused the suspicion of his flight instructor who reported him to the FBI.

Agents from the FBI and Immigration and Naturalization Service arrested Moussaoui on August 16 and charged him with immigration violation. His possessions aroused further suspicion, but FBI agents were unable to obtain approval to search his premises or computer. He remained in custody on 9/11 and was subsequently charged with involvement in the terrorist plot.

Final meeting in Spain

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed continued to exercise close supervision over the progress of the operation. A wanted man, unable to travel internationally himself, he relied on allies in Malaysia and Binalshibh to meet with the operatives in Kuala Lumpur in January 2000, and with Atta in Berlin in January 2001 and again in Spain in July 2001.

Binalshibh told Atta that with so many operatives now in the United States, bin Laden was worried about the security of the operation and wanted it carried out as soon as possible. Atta responded that there was still much to do. It would be August before Atta could indicate a date.

The final decision on the date of the operation could not be made until the last minute anyway. The hijackers needed good weather on the East Coast in order to avoid flight delays and offer good visibility for the pilots to see the targets.

One of the remaining tasks was selecting the flights so that the crashes could occur nearly at the same time. That meant that the hijackers had to calculate the departure cities, takeoff times, and estimated flight time to the targets. It was desirable to hijack planes taking off for long cross-country flights so that they would be full of fuel. Atta also indicated that he wanted all the aircraft to be Boeing rather than Airbus, since he believed that the latter had an autopilot feature that prevented them from being crashed into the ground.

Even at this late date, there was still some uncertainty about the final list of targets. Binalshibh told Atta that bin Laden was still pushing for the White House to be attacked instead of the Capitol Building. Atta responded that he thought the target was too difficult to hit, but that he had asked Hanjour for his assessment. Atta mentioned that he had contemplated crashing one of the hijacked planes into the nuclear power station near New York, but that the others did not like the idea as it was a difficult target to hit and likely to be defended.

Reconnaissance and rehearsals

With their training completed by mid-2001, the four pilots spent the remaining summer months watching security procedures at airports, taking reconnaissance flights, and making test runs with box cutters and small knives, which were chosen as the weapons they could most easily smuggle aboard and use to take over the planes.

The four pilots had already agreed on the target that each would attack. Atta divided the muscle hijackers according to the ability to speak English.

The best English speakers had to be distributed so that they could assist the others who spoke little English.

With the flights selected and teams sorted out, the next step was purchasing the tickets. This took place between August 25 and September 5.

Just days before the target date, the teams moved into their final positions. The hijackers of Flight 77 moved from New Jersey to a motel in Laurel, Maryland, about 20 miles from Dulles Airport.

The hijackers of Flight 93 moved from Florida to Newark, New Jersey.

The two teams targeting the World Trade Center moved into two hotels in Boston. Atta flew first from Fort Lauderdale to Baltimore, presumably to check in with the hijackers of Flight 77. He then flew to Boston where he met with the team that would fly into the World Trade Center's South Tower. Instead of staying in Boston with his own team, Atta flew to Portland, Maine with Abdulaziz al-Omari

The final hours

The hijackers made their final preparations. They would have had an opportunity to read copies of a four-page letter they were given, offering final instructions and spiritual advice as they prepared themselves for death.

They were instructed to shave their body hair, wear cologne, tighten their clothes so that they would not be uncovered in death, tie their shoes tight so that they would not come off—and to forget this world and purify their souls of all unclean things.

They were reminded to kill their prisoners, but also to sharpen their knives so as to not discomfort the animal during the slaughter.

They were exhorted not to be afraid, seem confused or show signs of nervous tension, but to be happy, optimistic, calm because they were heading for a deed that God loves. "Know that the gardens of paradise are waiting for you in all their beauty, and the women of paradise are waiting, calling out, 'Come hither, friend of God.' They have dressed in their most

beautiful clothing.” “Smile in the face of hardship young man, for you are heading toward eternal paradise.”³³

At 5:45 am on the morning of the 11th, Mohammed Atta and Abdul Aziz Omari went through security at the Portland airport in Maine. They boarded a commuter flight to Boston where they joined three other hijackers.

At 7:59 am, American Airlines Flight 11, with five hijackers on board, departed at 7:59 am.

At 8:15 am, United Airlines Flight 175 departed from Boston, with five hijackers on board. Six minutes later, its flight transponder was turned off.

At 8:20 am, American Airlines Flight 77, with five hijackers on board, departed from Washington Dulles Airport.

At 8:42 am, United Airlines Flight 93, with four hijackers on board, took off from Newark Airport. The plane pushed back from the gate at 8:01, but its takeoff was delayed for approximately 42 minutes by congestion at the airport. For the next four minutes, all four flights were in the air.

At 8:46 am, 47 minutes after departure, Flight 11 crashed into the World Trade Center’s North Tower.

At 9:03 am, 48 minutes after departure, Flight 175 crashed into the World Trade Center’s South Tower.

At 9:59 am, the South Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed.

At 9:37 am, Flight 77, one hour and 17 minutes after departure, crashed into the Pentagon.


At 10:03 am, one hour and 21 minutes after departure, Flight 93 crashed into a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

³³ “Last words of a terrorist,” *The Guardian*, September 30, 2001, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/30/terrorism.september113>

At 10:28, the North Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed.

Certification and Statement of Compensation

I certify that I hold all of the opinions expressed in this report to a reasonable degree of professional certainty. I am being compensated for my service as an expert at a rate of \$450 per hour.



Brian M. Jenkins

MARCH 10, 2020
Dated